

By Stephanie Harris

Hawa H₂O



As a water dealer serving Maui County, Hawaii, Brandon Arnds, general manager of Water Source and owner of Tropic Water, has faced his share of challenges and opportunities.

Hawaii water dealer finds opportunities with bottled water

"We service high-end new construction homes and commercial and industrial water conditioning issues," Arnds said. And although the current market situation has brought new construction starts down, the tourism market in Maui has kept Water Source thriving. "We also service commercial locations, and with Maui being a popular resort destination, we service a lot of the hotels and food service applications."

Because of the Hawaiian volcanoes, much of the water Arnds treats is contaminated with silica. "Different parts of the island have different water issues, but the whole state has issues with silica," he said. "We always have issues with silica and fouling reverse osmosis membranes. Silica is also a water spawning issue in the high-end homes."

Along with silica, Hawaii also has issues with hard water; therefore, water softeners are in high demand. "Some parts of the island has some of the best water in the world," Arnds said. "In other parts, because it's heavily agriculture, we have a lot of organics in the water and a TDS range of about 200 to 450 ppm."

Building a Bottling Plant

Arnds moved to Hawaii from California 10 years ago, and one thing he has noticed is that people in Hawaii want bottled water. "We opened a retail water store two-and-a-half years ago in a popular tourist destination, and we have a lot of people coming in, asking us if we deliver bottled water," Arnds said. "We saw this opportunity and figured we might as well take care of these people."

Along with the tourism market, Hawaii is also often affected by natural disasters such as hurricanes. "People love to badmouth bottled

water," Arnds said, "but whenever there's a disaster, who are always the first ones on the scene? It's the bottled water companies delivering water."

Water Source works closely with the local disaster preparedness teams and wants to be involved if there is ever a disaster on Maui. "We are in a hurricane area," he said, "and we want to be able to help out the community."

With this, the Water Source recently took on its most interesting installation—for itself: "We've been building our own bottling plant to bottle water for our new company called Tropic Water," Arnds said.

Recognizing the demand for bottled water in the area, Water Source jumped on an opportunity to purchase a warehouse and build its own bottling line. The company began a year ago with an empty warehouse, built an efficient bottling line and is set to open early this year.

Arnds bought the equipment from a broker who deals with used bottling equipment. "There are a lot of small bottlers in the country right now being bought out by larger bottlers, a lot of consolidation, so there is a lot of equipment on the market right now," he said. "We were able to buy this piece of equipment for pennies on a dollar and rebuild it. It was a lot of work and it took us a lot longer to build than we thought it would, but in the long run it's going to be better because we know every single nut and bolt on this piece of equipment."

The company purchased the used bottling line and rebuilt it from the bottom up. "We replaced every piece of equipment," Arnds said. "That has been a big hurdle, but in the long run it will probably be one of our best assets because any bottler knows if you have downtime, it can put you out of business. If we have downtime, all of us employees who worked



Water Source services residential, commercial and industrial markets in Maui, Hawaii, and will be opening their own bottling plant this year.

on this will be able to fix any piece of the bottling line within an hour."

The most challenging aspect of building a bottling plant, according to Arnds, has been the capital investment. "This past year, we've all been faced with a tightening and worsening market," he said. "Getting financed has been tough—our company has excellent credit and we had a tough time financing our delivery vehicles. Our family has put our monies together to build this plant."

Water Source is set to open its bottling plant, Tropic Water, early this year. "It's been a long project," Arnds said. "Managing that on top of our existing water conditioning dealership has been quite an endeavor." Arnds is looking forward to opening the new business and the opportunities it will bring. *wqp*

Stephanie Harris is managing editor of *Water Quality Products*. Harris can be reached at 847.391.1007 or by e-mail at sharris@sgcmail.com.

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